



Klamath Network Featured Creature

August 2010

Pacific Water or Marsh Shrew (*Sorex bendirii*)

FIELD NOTES:

General Description:

Sorex bendirii, also called the Marsh Shrew or Pacific Water Shrew, belongs to the Order Insectivora, Family Soricidae. The Marsh Shrew is the largest member in the genus *Sorex* in North America. It is distinguished from other *Sorex* species by the dark brown to black velvet like coat on its upper surface, dark brown lower surface, and a unicolored dark brown and long tail. Its body is approximately 16 cm (6.3 in) in length, including a 7 cm (2.8 in) long tail. It weighs about 13 g (0.4 oz) and the rear feet are large. As with other shrew species, Marsh Shrews have high metabolic rates and short lives, typically about 18 months.

Habitat:

The Pacific Water Shrew is associated with skunk cabbage marshes, red alder riparian and stream habitats, and wet riparian conifer forests. Most captures are in riparian habitats in close proximity to water, but may range further from streams in moist forests.

Where to See It in the Klamath Parks:

The Marsh Shrew occurs from southwest British Columbia, Canada, south to approximately San Francisco Bay, California, usually in maritime influence forests at low to moderate elevations. In the Klamath Network, the species is most likely to be seen in Redwood National and State Parks, and perhaps at low elevations of Crater Lake NP and Oregon Caves NM.



Sorex bendirii

Photo Credit: Ron Altig



Sorex bendirii feeding on a slug.

Illustration Credit: Nancy Halliday
from *Mammals of North America*, ©
Princeton University Press (2002)

For More Information:

Verts, B. J., and L. N. Carraway.
1998. Land mammals of Oregon.
University of California Press,
Berkeley, CA.

Kays, R. W., and D. E. Wilson. 2002.
Mammals of North America.
Princeton University Press,
Princeton, NJ.

Reproduction and Development:

Across the range of the species, the breeding season extends from late January to late August, with two to three litters per year. Gestation lasts about three weeks. The female has a litter of 3 or 4 young in a nest in a tunnel or under a log. Males do not breed in their first summer, and due to their short lifespan, enjoy just one “summer of love,” before dying the next winter.

The range and numbers of these animals are thought to have declined due to loss of suitable wetland habitat throughout their range, especially near urban areas and farmlands, yet the low level of captures range-wide preclude accurate population estimates. The IUCN considers it a species of less concern.

Diet:

The Marsh Shrew’s diet includes a diversity of aquatic invertebrates, including earthworms, mayfly naiads, slugs, and snails. Anecdotal reports of prey on salmon parr have been reported. It is active during the day but generally more active at night.

Cool Fact:

The large hind feet of Marsh Shrews are “fimbriated,” which means they have coarse hairs on the toes, to aid in swimming. Their fimbriated feet give these aquatic mammals Michael Phelps-like thrust as they pursue their aquatic prey.